

## **Pool Bridge Farm, Wheldrake Lane, York, YO19**

Planning application for the erection of 2 no. timber cabins to provide changing facilities for wild swimming activities.

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Planning, Design, Access and Statement  
(including Flood Risk Assessment)

October 2023



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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Statement has been prepared on behalf of Steve Fletcher, part owner of Pool Bridge Farm on Wheldrake Lane in Crockey Hill, York. It supports a retrospective planning application for the installation of 2 no. timber cabins at the centre of the site, which are to be used as changing facilities for the neighbouring wild swimming activities.
- 1.2 The landholding at Pool Bridge covers an area of approximately 138 acres and has been farmed by the Fletcher family since 1952. Originally an arable and grassland farm, the family has diversified over the years and the site now accommodates five man-made lakes, a series of caravan pitches, a camping site and a café, alongside the retained farming land.
- 1.3 The lakes were dug in the period from 1964 – 2008 and until recently, they had been used for coarse fishing with the most recent one 'Q Lake' operating as a specimen carp lake. However, 3 of the lakes have since been repurposed for wild swimming activities which are available 365 days per year and operate on either a booking system or pay-as-you swim basis.
- 1.4 The wild swimming activity has proven to be very popular, with the lakes offering a natural and tranquil environment for incoming guests. It is a unique facility for the local area and is used by a wide age-range, with both adults-only and family-oriented swimming lakes. Supporting facilities currently include a mobile sauna, hot showers, toilets and an on-site café. The proposed cabins are required to provide male and female changing facilities.

## 2.0 The Site and its Surroundings

- 2.1 Pool Bridge Farm is located to the north of Wheldrake Lane as it extends eastwards from the rural area of Crockey Hill at the southern edge of York's Green Belt. The entire farm holding covers approximately 138 acres and is divided between two separate parcels of land, located either side of the Lockwood Forestry Plantation. The land to the west of the plantation fronts on to Wheldrake Lane and is predominantly used as grazing land. The land to the east of the plantation is broadly triangular in shape and is defined by the watercourses of Tilmire Drain to the east and Heslington Common Dyke to the west, both of which taper towards the site's entrance off Wheldrake Lane. The northern boundary of the farm is located approximately 1km from Wheldrake Lane and there is a central farm track, which provides access through the site.
- 2.2 In broad terms, two thirds of the land in the northern part of the site is still in agricultural use. It is arable land, which is subject to the Natural England Higher Level Stewardship scheme. The southern third of the farm is where the main diversification activity has taken place. It comprises 5 man-made lakes, an area for caravan pitches, a camping site with supporting facilities and a large car park with space for over 100 vehicles. There is a cluster of buildings to the south-east of the car park, including the café, agricultural storage barns, the original farmhouse and a new residential dwelling, which extends north from a converted brick building at the southern edge of the cluster.
- 2.3 The neighbouring dwellings and surrounding buildings are set back approximately 175m from Wheldrake Lane and the intervening land is made up of grass fields, the open ditch for Tilmire drain and a linear fishing lake (Lake A), which runs parallel to the site's eastern boundary. The lake is surrounded by dense planting on its southern side, which limits views of the buildings from the south and east.
- 2.4 The application site comprises a small pocket of land (0.1 ha) to the north of the site car park, to the east of the M-lake. It had previously been used for the siting of up to 7 tourer caravans, which was regularised by a certificate of lawful development 09/00179/CLU granted in 2009. The proposed cabins utilise 2 of the southern-most pitches. They are

located adjacent to a farm track that runs through the centre of the site and offer walk-up access to the lakeside.

- 2.5 There is a single point of access to the site, off Wheldrake Lane, which leads to a 5m wide track running along the farm's western boundary. The track sweeps around the rear of the neighbouring farmhouses, crossing Tilmire drain over a short, culverted section. Vehicular access to the café is provided through the main visitor car park. A narrower track continues to the north and runs along the eastern side of the application site although customers using the swimming lakes / changing facilities will stop at the visitor car park.

### 3.0 Proposals for Development

- 3.1 The proposal is for the installation of 2 no. timber cabins to provide changing facilities and seating areas for the neighbouring wild swimming activity. At present, customers using the lakes are required to either arrive ready or change in the open air, with limited privacy. The proposed cabins will offer private changing areas for males and females offering shelter and enclosure. They will be heated during the colder winter months.



Photograph 1: Prefabricated timber cabins

- 3.2 The proposed cabins take the form of a typical prefabricated pod, with shiplap timber walls and hexagonal felt roof tiles. They are single storey buildings, with a front entrance porch leading to the main changing and seating area. The spherical form of the pod leads to an interesting roof form. The changing rooms are both 17sqm in size. They sit on the stone base of the former caravan pitches and are surrounded by grass with no external paths or areas of hardstanding.

## 4.0 Planning Policy

- 4.1 The determination of this planning application is to be made under Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2 The development plan for York comprises the saved policies of the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) relating to the general extent of the York Green Belt. These are policies YH9(C) and Y1 (C1 and C2) which relate to York's Green Belt and the key diagram insofar as it illustrates general extent of the Green Belt.
- 4.3 The City of York Draft Local Plan Incorporating the Fourth Set of Changes was approved for Development Management purposes in April 2005 (DCLP). Whilst the DCLP does not form part of the statutory development plan, its policies are capable of being material considerations in the determination of planning applications where they are consistent with the NPPF, although the weight that can be afforded to them is very limited.
- 4.4 Publication Draft City of York Local Plan 2018 (the emerging plan) was submitted for examination on 25 May 2018. Phase 1 of the hearings into the examination of the Local Plan took place in December 2019 with further sessions held between May and September 2022. The Council undertook further consultation on a series of modifications to the Plan in February / March 2023. In accordance with paragraph 48 of the NPPF (September 2023), the emerging plan policies can be afforded weight according to
- a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced the preparation, the greater the weight that may be given)
  - b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies; and

- c) the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the NPPF published (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)

4.5 The NPPF (September 2023) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and outlines how they are expected to be applied and is a material consideration. Given the current status of local plan policy in York it is clear that the Framework will provide the main policy basis on which this application is determined with the Local Plan Publication Draft (2018) being a material consideration of only limited weight, depending on the degree to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies and the degree of consistency with policies of the NPPF.

4.6 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF sets out the policies for supporting a prosperous rural economy. It states that planning decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.
- c) (c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and
- d) (d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

4.7 Paragraphs 137-151 relates to the use of the Green Belt. At Paragraph 145, the Framework states that once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

4.8 Paragraph 149 states that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. The exceptions to this general rule include the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land

or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

- 4.9 The application site lies within flood zone 2 and therefore, policies in the NPPF which seek to avoid vulnerability to flooding also apply. In this respect, Paragraph 161 sets out the need to apply a sequential, risk-based approach to the location of development. The aim of the sequential test is to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding from any source.
- 4.10 If it is not possible for development to be located in areas with a lower risk of flooding, the exception test may have to be applied. The need for the exception test will depend on the potential vulnerability of the site and of the development proposed, in line with the Flood Risk Vulnerability Classification set out in Annex 3 of the Framework. This defines changing rooms for outdoor sport and recreation as a water compatible development.
- 4.11 The related policies ENV4 (Flood Risk) and GB1 (Development in the Green Belt) of the York Local Plan are consistent with the approach set out within the NPPF.

## **5.0 Appraisal**

### **Principle of Development**

- 5.1 For over 60 years the Fletcher family have tended to the land at Pool Bridge Farm and the overall management responsibility for the business has already spanned across three generations. The farm as it exists today is vastly different from the arable farm that was run by the family between 1952 and 1984. From the mid 1980's, the business has continued to diversify from traditional farming activities, most recently re-purposing 3 of their 5 man-made lakes as a wild swimming facility.



- 5.2 The diversification of Pool Bridge Farm has been successful in maintaining the economic viability of the business. It is in complete alignment with paragraph 84 of the NPPF and Policy EC5 of Draft Local Plan, which seek to promote a prosperous rural economy.
- 5.3 The wild swimming activity has been particularly popular, operating on a 365-day per year basis from sunrise to sunset. As a recreational facility, it offers an appropriate use of land in the Green Belt and the construction of new buildings in connection with this use should not be regarded as inappropriate under paragraph 149 of the NPPF.
- 5.4 The proposed pods will provide private, safe changing facilities for customers using the adjacent M Lake and Horseshoe Lake and will be heated during the colder months which is essential for customer health and safety. At present, swimmers are required to change in the open area or the semi-enclosed and un-heated changing barn to the south of Monet Lake. The pods will improve the quality of the facilities at the venue. They are a necessary intervention as the business continues to grow.

### **Visual Impact**

- 5.5 In visual terms, the changing facilities take on the form of a prefabricated glamping pod which are commonly located within the Green Belt. They are single storey in height, surrounded by vegetation and are sited on part of the farm that would otherwise be used for touring caravans. The position of the cabins, within the centre of the site mean that they cannot be seen from surrounding public vantage points or the main visitor car park. The proposed buildings do not affect the openness of the Green Belt.

### **Flood Risk Assessment**

- 5.6 The majority of the southern half of Pool Bridge Farm and the area around the lakes falls within Flood Zone 2 or 3. The application site falls within flood zone 2, meaning that it is necessary to carry out a sequential test for the development in the context of Paragraph 161 of the NPPF. However, as the facilities are related to the activity which takes place within the lake there is a need for them to be conveniently located adjacent to them. There is no other location within flood zone 1 that would offer the same convenience. As changing

rooms outdoor recreation, the proposed development is categorised as 'water compatible' and satisfies the exceptions test.

### **Summary**

- 5.7 This Statement supports a retrospective planning application for the construction of 2 no. timber cabins at Pool Bridge Farm, to be used as changing rooms in connection with the adjacent wild swimming lakes. The re-purposing of the former fishing lakes for swimming has created a unique recreational facility that supports local health and well-being. It represents the next step in the successful diversification of the farm and the proposed changing rooms will improve the standard of facilities on offer. They support an acceptable Green Belt use, which contributes to the local rural economy. There are no impacts of the developments in terms of flooding or visual impact that cannot be managed or are not heavily outweighed by the benefits. We therefore respectfully request that planning permission is granted for the development.